

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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RONALD EDWARD WILLIAMS,

Plaintiff,

Civil Action No.  
5:13-CV-0422 (NAM/DEP)

v.

UNITED STATES,

Defendant.

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APPEARANCES:

OF COUNSEL:

FOR PLAINTIFF:

Ronald Edward Williams, *Pro Se*  
05122-055  
Terre Haute Federal Correctional Institution  
P.O. Box 33  
Terre Haute, IN 47808

FOR DEFENDANT:

[NONE]

DAVID E. PEEBLES  
U.S. MAGISTRATE JUDGE

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

*Pro se* plaintiff Ronald Edward Williams, a federal inmate currently incarcerated at the Terre Haute Federal Correctional Institution, commenced this action against the United States through the submission

of a complaint and supporting documentation. Dkt. Nos. 1-3. Plaintiff's initial submissions, however, neither included the requisite filing fee nor a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* ("IFP"). As a result, in a report issued on June 7, 2013, I recommended to Senior District Judge Norman A. Mordue that he issue an order directing plaintiff to either pay the filing fee or submit an application to proceed IFP. Dkt. No. 5. On August 29, 2013, Judge Mordue adopted that report, Dkt. No. 11, and plaintiff subsequently filed a motion for leave to proceed IFP, Dkt. No. 12. Plaintiff's IFP application has been referred to me for review. For the reasons set forth below, I recommend that plaintiff's motion to proceed IFP be denied.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff's complaint is far from a model of clarity. It suggests that this action is commenced under Rule 7001 of the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, but it fails to identify a related bankruptcy proceeding. Dkt. No. 1 at 1. Generally, and liberally construed, the complaint alleges that defendant United Stated engaged in a fraudulent transfer of plaintiff's property pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2041-2043, and that the transfer relates to a criminal action pending against plaintiff in this

district. Dkt. No. 1 at 2, 3. The complaint sets forth no prayer for relief.

## II. DISCUSSION

When a civil action is commenced in a federal district court, the statutory filing fee, set at \$350 at the time plaintiff filed this action, must ordinarily be paid.<sup>1</sup> 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(a). Although a court is authorized to permit a litigant to proceed IFP if it is determined that he is unable to pay the required filing fee, 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1), section 1915(g) provides that

[i]n no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under this section if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.

28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). The manifest intent of Congress in enacting this “three strikes” provision was to deter the filing of multiple, frivolous civil rights suits by prison inmates. *Tafari v. Hues*, 473 F.3d 440, 443-44 (2d Cir. 2007) (citing *Nicholas v. Tucker*, 114 F.3d 17, 19 (2d Cir. 1997));

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<sup>1</sup> Effective May 1, 2013, the Judicial Conference increased the fee for commencing an action in a federal district court from \$350 to \$400 by adding a \$50 administrative fee. Because plaintiff commenced this action prior to the effective date of this increase, the filing fee in this case remains \$350.

accord, *Gill v. Pidlychak*, No. 02-CV-1460, 2006 WL 3751340, at \*2 (N.D.N.Y. Dec. 19, 2006) (Scullin, S.J., adopting report and recommendation by Teece, M.J.).<sup>2</sup> The prophylactic effect envisioned under section 1915(g) is accomplished by requiring a prisoner who has accumulated three strikes to engage in the same cost-benefit analysis before filing suit as other civil litigants engage in – that is, the provision forces inmates to assess whether the result sought to be achieved justifies the filing fee expenditure. *Tafari*, 473 F.3d at 443.

The Second Circuit has defined a frivolous claim as one that “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Tafari*, 473 F.3d at 442 (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989)). *Id.* To determine whether a dismissal satisfies the failure-to-state-a-claim prong of section 1915, courts look to Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for guidance. *Tafari*, 473 F.3d at 442. The question of whether the dismissal of a prior action constitutes a strike for purposes of section 1915(g) is a matter of statutory interpretation, and as such a question for the court. *Id.*

In this case, as of April 15, 2013, the date upon which this action was commenced, plaintiff had accrued three dismissals qualifying as

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<sup>2</sup> All unreported decisions cited in this report have been appended for the convenience of the *pro se* plaintiff.

strikes under section 1915(g). Plaintiff accrued his first strike in *Williams v. Annucci*, No. 10-CV-0836 (N.D.N.Y. filed on July 9, 2010) (Hurd, J.). District Judge David N. Hurd dismissed the case, on December 6, 2010, upon finding that plaintiff's complaint, "as presented to the Court, cannot be supported by an arguable basis in law and must therefore be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A for failure to state a claim." *Annucci*, No. 10-CV-0836, Decision and Order (Dkt. No. 5) at 8. Plaintiff accrued his second strike in *Williams v. Gould*, No. 11-CV-1501 (N.D.N.Y. filed on Dec. 21, 2011) (Hurd, J.). In that case, Judge Hurd again dismissed plaintiff's amended complaint on July 31, 2012, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A. *Gould*, No. 11-CV-1501, Decision and Order (Dkt. No. 13) at 7. Plaintiff accrued a third strike on January 14, 2013, when the Second Circuit dismissed his appeal in *Gould*, No. 11-CV-1501, "because it lacks an arguable basis in law or fact."<sup>3</sup> *Gould*, 11-CV-1501, Mandate (Dkt. No. 18). Because plaintiff accrued three strikes under section 1915(g) four months prior to commencing this action, it appears that he is not permitted to proceed IFP in this action.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2010, the Second Circuit said that "an incarcerated plaintiff incurs two strikes when a complaint and subsequent appeal are independently dismissed for grounds listed in [section] 1915(g)." *Chavis v. Chappius*, 618 F.3d 162, 165 (2d Cir. 2010); *accord, Mills v. Fischer*, 645 F.3d 176, 177 n.1 (2d Cir. 2011).

As a safety valve, section 1915(g) provides that a prisoner who is in “imminent danger of serious physical injury” may avoid application of the three strikes rule of section 1915(g). 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g); see also *Malik v. McGinnis*, 293 F.3d 559, 562-63 (2d Cir. 2002). In accordance with this exception, an inmate who has had three prior “strikes” but nonetheless wishes to commence a new action IFP must show that he was under imminent danger at the time of filing; the exception does not provide a basis to avoid application of the three strikes on the basis of past harm. *Malik*, 293 F.3d at 562-63. An inmate who claims the benefit of this exception must also show that the danger faced rises to the level of exposure to a “serious physical injury.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). The imminent danger claimed by the inmate, moreover, must be real, and not merely speculative or hypothetical. *Johnson v. Barney*, No. 04-CV-10204, 2005 WL 2173950, at \*1-2 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 6, 2005) (finding that inmate’s allegation of danger at facility he was not housed at, but may pass through at infrequent occasions in the future, does not establish imminent danger).

For a three-strikes litigant to qualify for the imminent danger exception, his complaint “must reveal a nexus between the imminent danger it alleges and the claims it asserts.” *Pettus v. Morgenthau*, 554

F.3d 293, 298 (2d Cir. 2009). When determining whether the requisite relationship is present a court must examine “(1) whether the imminent danger of serious physical injury that a three-strikes litigant alleges is *fairly traceable* to unlawful conduct asserted in the complaint and (2) whether a favorable judicial outcome would *redress* that injury.” *Id.* at 299 (emphasis in original).

The term “serious physical injury,” as utilized in section 1915(g), is nowhere concretely defined, although it has been construed by various courts as including a “disease that could result in serious harm or even death[.]” *Ibrahim v. D.C.*, 463 F.3d 3, 7 (D.C. 2006). In deciding whether to invoke the exception, a court must examine the available pleadings, construed in a light most favorable to the plaintiff, to determine whether the plaintiff has alleged a serious physical injury. *McAlphin v. Toney*, 281 F.3d 709, 710 (8th Cir. 2002).

Here, plaintiff’s complaint fails to allege any facts related to a physical injury. See generally Complaint (Dkt. No. 1). For that reason, I find that the imminent danger exception does not apply, and plaintiff’s IFP application should be denied.

III. SUMMARY AND ORDER

Because plaintiff accumulated three strikes pursuant to section 1915(g) prior to the commencement of this action, he is precluded from proceeding IFP in this case. Accordingly, it is hereby respectfully

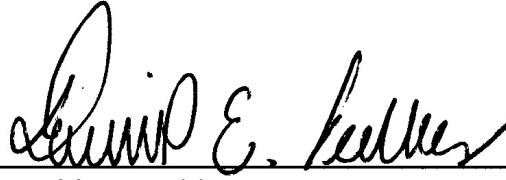
RECOMMENDED that plaintiff's motion to proceed *in forma pauperis* (Dkt. No. 12) be denied, and that plaintiff be permitted an opportunity to pay the full filing fee of \$400 no later than thirty days from the date of any order adopting this report. Plaintiff is advised that his failure to pay the full filing fee will result in dismissal of this action without further action by the court.

NOTICE: Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), the parties may lodge written objections to the foregoing report. Such objections must be filed with the clerk of the court within FOURTEEN days of service of this report.

FAILURE TO SO OBJECT TO THIS REPORT WILL PRECLUDE APPELLATE REVIEW. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), 6(d), 72; *Roldan v. Racette*, 984 F.2d 85 (2d Cir. 1993).

It is hereby ORDERED that the clerk of the court serve a copy of this report and recommendation upon the plaintiff in accordance with this court's local rules.

Dated: September 25, 2013  
Syracuse, New York

  
David E. Peebles  
David E. Peebles  
U.S. Magistrate Judge

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Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.

United States District Court,

N.D. New York.

Anthony G. GILL, Plaintiff,

v.

Chris PIDLYPCHAK, Correction Officer and T.G.

Dygert, Correction Officer, Defendants.

No. 902-CV-1460 (FJS/RFT).

Dec. 19, 2006.

Anthony G. Gill, of counsel, Comstock, NY, Plaintiff, Pro Se.

Hon. [Eliot Spitzer](#), Attorney General of the State of New York, [Douglas Goglia, Esq.](#), Asst. Attorney General, of counsel, Albany, NY, for Defendants.

### DECISION AND ORDER

FREDERICK J. SCULLIN, JR., S.J.

\*1 The above-captioned matter having been presented to me by the Report-Recommendation of Magistrate Judge Randolph F. Treece filed November 20, 2006 and the Court having reviewed the Report-Recommendation and the entire file in this matter, and no objections to said Report-Recommendation having been filed, it is hereby

**ORDERED**, that the Report-Recommendation of Magistrate Judge Randolph F. Treece filed November 20, 2006 is **ACCEPTED** in its entirety, for the reasons stated therein; and it is further

**ORDERED**, that the Order granting Gill's IFP status is **VACATED**; and it is further

**ORDERED**, that Defendants' Letter-Motion seeking dismissal of Gill's Complaint pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(g\)](#) is **GRANTED** unless Gill pays the filing fee of \$150.00 within thirty days of this final order.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

[RANDOLPH F. TREECE](#), United States Magistrate Judge

### REPORT-RECOMMENDATION and ORDER

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Pro se Plaintiff Anthony Gill brings this civil action pursuant to [42 U.S.C. § 1983](#), alleging Defendants violated his civil rights while he was incarcerated at the Auburn Correctional Facility. Dkt. No. 1, Compl. [FN1](#). Specifically, Gills alleges Defendants Pidlypchak and Dygert filed false misbehavior reports against him and harassed him in retaliation for the filing of numerous institutional grievances against them and a civil lawsuit against Pidlypchak for smoking violations. Compl., Pl.'s Statement of Facts.

[FN1](#). On December 23, 2002, Defendants filed a Motion to Dismiss Gill's Complaint pursuant to [FED.R.CIV.P. 12\(b\)\(6\)](#) for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. Dkt. No. 6, Mot. to Dismiss. By Order of the Honorable Joseph M. Hood, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky sitting by designation, Defendants' Motion was granted dismissing Gill's complaint with prejudice. Dkt. No. 17, Decision & Order, dated July 28, 2003. Judgment was entered on August 1, 2003 and Gill appealed. Dkt. Nos. 18 & 19, Notice of Appeal, dated Aug. 4, 2003. The Second Circuit affirmed the District Court's dismissal of Gill's Eighth Amendment claim, but vacated the Judgment of the District Court dismissing Gill's First Amendment claim and remanded the action back to the District Court. [Gill v. Pidlypchak, 389 F.3d 379 \(2d Cir.2004\)](#).

Presently before the Court is Defendants' Letter-Motion requesting an order revoking Gill's *in forma pauperis* (IFP) status and conditionally dismissing this action pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(g\)](#) pending Gill's prompt payment of the statutory filing fee of \$150.00. [FN2](#) Dkt. No. 35, Defs.' Lt.-Mot., dated June 19, 2006, at p. 1. Gill opposes the motion. Dkt. No. 38, Pl.'s Lt.-Resp.,

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dated July 21, 2006. For the reasons that follow, it is hereby recommended that the Order granting Gill's IFP status be **vacated** and that Defendants' Motion pursuant to § 1915(g) be **granted** unless Gill pays the filing fee of \$150.00 **within thirty days (30) days** of the entry of the final order by the District Court.

FN2. Although Defendants' Letter-Motion states \$250.00 as the required filing fee for this action, Defs.' Lt.-Mot. at p. 1, “[D]efendants and their counsel acknowledge that the filing fee was \$150.00 when this action was commenced, and their request that [P]laintiff be required to fully pay a filing fee of \$250.00 to avoid the dismissal of this action was merely an oversight.” Dkt. No. 37, Defs.' Lt.-Reply, dated July 27, 2006, at p. 1.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. 28 U.S.C. § 1915

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915, individuals may seek leave of the court to pursue their claims without prepayment of fees and costs and proceed with the litigation as a poor person or *in forma pauperis*. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1). The IFP statute enables prisoners to similarly apply for this privilege, and indeed, many, if not most, incarcerated individuals bringing suits have taken advantage of such opportunity. Id. at § 1915(a)(2). Also under this statute, a court may *sua sponte* dismiss a case if it determines that such action is (1) frivolous or malicious, (2) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted, or (3) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. Id. at § 1915(e)(2).

\*2 Recognizing the potential for prisoner abuse and seeking to relieve congestion of patently frivolous prisoner suits, Congress enacted the Prisoner Litigation Reform Act (**PLRA**) of 1996, which renders several restrictions on a **prisoner's** ability to exploit the justice system. One such mechanism is the so-called “three **strikes** rule” which bars inmates from proceeding IFP after three or more previous claims, where the prisoner was granted IFP status, have been **dismissed** as “frivolous, malicious, or [for] fail[ing] to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.” *Id.*

In recognizing the legitimate government interests fostered by the **PLRA** amendments, the Second Circuit stated that,

[p]rior to the enactment of the *in forma pauperis* amendments, inmates suffered no economic disincentive to **filing lawsuits**. Indeed, the very nature of incarceration-prisoners have substantial free time on their hands, their basic living expenses are paid by the state and they are provided free of charge the essential resources needed to **file** actions and appeals, such as paper, pens, envelopes and legal materials-has fostered a “ ‘nothing to lose and everything to gain’ ” environment which allows inmates indiscriminately to **file** suit at taxpayers' expense. See Anderson v. Coughlin, 700 F.2d 37, 42 (2d Cir.1983) (quoting Jones v. Bales, 58 F.R.D. 453, 463-64 (N.D.Ga.1972), aff'd, 480 F.2d 805 (5th Cir.1973).

Nicholas v. Tucker 114 F.3d 17, 20 (2d Cir.1997).

In calculating which cases **count** towards the three **strikes** rule, a court may look to **dismissals** which predated the enactment of the **PLRA**. Welch v. Galie, 207 F.3d 130, 132 (2d Cir.2000). The Second Circuit has held such a calculation to be proper and constitutional given that the determination to revoke IFP status in no way affects the merits of the **prisoner's** case, but rather prevents the inmate from continuing suit without the payment of fees. *Id.*

### B. Gill's “Three Strikes”

As noted by the Second Circuit, Gill “is no stranger ... to the federal courts.” Gill v. Pidlypchak, 389 F.3d 379, 384 (2d Cir.2004). He “has **commenced** at least 116 different [actions] against the State of New York, its executive agencies, and its officials and employees, *see Gill v. Calescibetta*, 00-CV-1553, Decision & Order, dated Aug. 5, 2004, at p. 3, n. 2 (N.D.N.Y.); has **filed** at least thirty-nine (39) different **lawsuits** in district courts within the Second Circuit, *see* Defs.' Lt.-Mot., Supp. 4; and has initiated nineteen (19) suits, in addition to the pending action, in this District alone.<sup>FN3</sup> In fact, this Court has previously held that in light of Gill's experience in federal court and his overly litigious nature, he is not

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entitled to “the special solicitude afforded [to] *pro se* litigants [.].” *Gill v. Riddick*, 2005 WL 755745, at \*2 (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 31, 2005).

FN3. See (1) *Gill v. LeFevre*, 85-CV-1534 (HGM/RWS) (closed on Jan. 17, 1992-failure to prosecute); (2) *Gill v. Padilla*, 88-CV-147 (NPM/RWS) (closed on Mar. 26, 1992-failure to prosecute); (3) *Gill v. Burch*, 94-CV-369 (FJS/DNH) (closed on Apr. 1, 1999-Def.' Mot. for Summ. J. granted); (4) *Gill v. Kramer*, 98-CV-45 (FJS/GJD) (closed on Sept. 30, 1999-Stip. of Discont.); (5) *Gill v. Anderson*, 98-CV-1472 (LEK/GLS) (closed on Mar. 3, 2003-Def.' Mot. for Summ. J. granted); (6) *Gill v. Gummerson*, 99-CV-761 (NAM/DEP) (closed on Aug. 20, 2003-Jury Verdict for Defs.); (7) *Gill v. Dann*, 00-CV-566 (NAM/RFT) (closed on Nov. 21, 2001-failure to prosecute); (8) *Gill v. Tuttle*, 00-CV-585 (DNH/DRH) (currently pending); (9) *Gill v. Doe*, 00-CV-983 (GLS/DEP) (closed on June 8, 2004-Def.' Mot. for Summ. J. granted); (10) *Gill v. Calescibetta*, 00-CV-1553 (LEK/DEP) (currently stayed); (11) *Gill v. McGinnis*, 00-CV-1787 (LEK/RWS) (*habeas corpus* petition transferred to S.D.N.Y. on Dec. 19, 2000); (12) *Gill v. Smith*, 00-CV-1905 (FJS/GJD) (currently pending); (13) *Gill v. Butero*, 01-CV-82 (LEK/DRH) (closed on Apr. 30, 2003-Def.' Mot. to Dismiss granted at trial); (14) *Gill v. Hoadley*, 01-CV-323 (FJS/DEP) (currently pending); (15) *Gill v. Steinberg*, 02-CV-82 (DNH/DEP) (closed on Feb. 19, 2004-Stip. of Discont.); (16) *Gill v. Pflueger*, 02-CV-130 (DNH/GJD) (closed on Jan. 30, 2003-Def.' Mot. to Dismiss granted); (17) *Gill v. Coyne*, 02-CV-1380 (TJM/GHL) (closed on June 22, 2006-Def.' Mot. for Summ. J. granted); (18) *Gill v. Erickson*, 02-CV-1573 (LEK/RFT) (transferred to S.D.N.Y. on Jan. 21, 2003); and (19) *Gill v. Riddick*, 03-CV-1456 (NAM/RFT) (currently pending).

When Gill commenced this action on November 20, 2002, he had already acquired at least three “strikes” for purposes of § 1915(g). A review of the cases cited in Defendants' Letter-Motion shows that Gill, while

incarcerated or detained, brought actions on three or more occasions that were dismissed for “strike” reasons: *Gill v. Accetulli*, 92-CV-5039 (S.D.N.Y. July 8, 1992) (dismissed *sua sponte* as “lack[ing] an arguable basis either in law or in fact”) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted); *Gill v. Anna M. Kross Center*, 92-CV-9326 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 28, 1992) (dismissed *sua sponte* as “lack[ing] an arguable basis either in law or in fact”) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted); *Gill v. LeFevre*, 85-CV-1534 (N.D.N.Y. Jan. 13, 1992) (dismissed for failure to prosecute pursuant to FED.R.CIV.P. 11); and *Gill v. Padilla*, 88-CV-147 (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 24, 1992) (dismissed for failure to prosecute pursuant to FED.R.CIV.P. 11).<sup>FN4</sup> Defs.' Lt.-Mot. at p. 2.

FN4. In their Letter-Motion, Defendants' assert that “[i]n light of *Gill v. Eberhardt*, 04-CV-197Sc (W.D.N.Y. July 30, 2004), Gill is collaterally estopped from asserting that he has not accrued four ‘strikes’ by the end of 1992, and at least six ‘strikes’ in total.” Defs.' Lt.-Mot. at p. 2, n. 4; see Defs.' Lt.-Reply at p. 2. Defendants' concede, however, that two of six actions cited as “strikes” by the Western District in the *Eberhardt* decision, “*Gill v. Anderson* and *Gill v. Pflueger* [,] ... were dismissed after this action was commenced, and therefore, do not count as ‘strikes’ for purposes of assessing whether Gill is entitled to IFP status[.]” Defs.' Lt.-Mot. at p. 2. Therefore, Defendants' rely on the remaining four cases to support their conclusion that Gill has acquired the requisite “three strikes” to revoke his IFP status. While the Court agrees with Defendants' conclusion, we do not rely on Defendants' estoppel reasoning as the *Eberhardt* case was not decided by the Western District until after Gill commenced this action. We, instead, engage in our own independent review of the cases cited in the *Eberhardt* decision.

#### C. Application of *Snider v. Melindez* and *DeLeon v. Doe*

\*3 Gill contends that § 1915(g) does not apply to him because the cases cited in Defendants' Letter-Motion as “strikes” do not meet the requirements set forth by the

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Second Circuit in [\*Snider v. Melindez\*, 199 F.3d 108 \(2d Cir.1999\)](#) and clarified in [\*DeLeon v. Doe\*, 361 F.3d 93 \(2d Cir.2004\)](#). Pl.'s Lt.-Resp. at pp. 2-3. According to Gill, the cited cases "fail to indicate w [h]ere dismissals [were] with prejudice or without prejudice as mandated in *Snider*." Pl.'s Lt.-Resp. at p. 3.

In *Snider v. Melindez*, the Second Circuit held that the "three strikes rule" was intended to apply to those "nonmeritorious suits dismissed with prejudice, not suits dismissed without prejudice for failure to comply with a procedural prerequisite." [\*Snider v. Melindez\*, 199 F.3d at 111.](#)<sup>FN5</sup> The Court noted in that case that there are a variety of procedural reasons for which a case may be dismissed *sua sponte* and such a dismissal does not necessarily render a determination on the merits as, for example, a dismissal for frivolousness would. See [\*id.\* at 111-113](#). Indeed, the Supreme Court has directed that an action is frivolous when it is based on an indisputably meritless legal theory or presents factual contentions that are clearly baseless, thus such dismissal is one on the "merits" of the case. [\*Neitzke v. Williams\*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 \(1989\)](#) (cited in [\*Welch v. Galie\*, 207 F.3d 130, 132 \(2d Cir.2000\)](#)).

<sup>FN5</sup> In *Snider*, the Second Circuit held that a pre-answer dismissal based upon a failure to exhaust administrative remedies is a dismissal for failure to comply with procedural prerequisites and such a non prejudicial dismissal does not count towards the "three strikes rule."

In *DeLeon v. Doe*, the Second Circuit, in upholding its ruling in *Snider*, reiterated that "district court judgments *should* clearly set forth the reasons for dismissal, including whether the dismissal is because the claim is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim, whether it is because the prisoner has failed to exhaust an available administrative remedy, or for other reasons." [\*361 F.3d at 95\*](#) (emphasis in original) (internal quotation marks omitted). The Second Circuit further noted that "[t]hese judgment[s] should also state whether the dismissal is with prejudice or without," and that "[c]larifications of this sort 'will undoubtedly assist subsequent courts that must determine whether a plaintiff is barred from maintaining an action *in forma pauperis* by the three strikes rule of Section 1915(g).'" *Id.*

Gill's interpretation of *Snider* and *DeLeon* as they apply to the cases cited by the Defendants is flawed. First, although *Snider* is clear in its application to those cases dismissed on the merits, the Second Circuit does not mandate that district courts expressly use the language "with or without prejudice" in judgments of dismissal. The language used by the Second Circuit, specifically the term "should," indicates that the language is advisory or instructive rather than mandatory. If the Second Circuit had intended district courts to include this specific language, as Gill argues, it would have stated that the district courts "must" or "shall," which indicates a mandate or requirement.

\*4 Second, Gill's arguments display a crafty articulation of both the *Snider* and *Doe* cases as they apply to § 1915(g) strikes. Both cases addressed the issue of "whether the entry of a strike [under § 1915(g)] is properly considered *at the time an action is dismissed*." *Id.* (citing [\*Snider v. Melindez\*, 199 F.3d at 115](#)) (emphasis added). While the Second Circuit expressed strong doubt about this issue in *Snider*, it decided the matter in *DeLeon* and held that "district courts should not issue these **strikes** one by one, in their orders of judgment, as they dispose of suits that may ultimately-upon determination at a proper time-qualify as **strikes** under the terms of § 1915(g)." <sup>FN6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>FN6</sup> The Second Circuit in *DeLeon* based its holding on its rationale in *Snider*, which reads:

The designation of **strikes** has no practical consequences until a defendant in a **prisoner's lawsuit** raises the contention that the **prisoner's** suit or appeal may not be maintained *in forma pauperis* pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 1915](#) because the prisoner has accumulated three **strikes**. At that time, because a practical consequence turns on the answer to the question, a court will need to determine whether the prisoner should be charged with three **strikes**. Litigation over the issue at an earlier juncture would involve the courts in disputes that might never have any practical consequence.

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*DeLeon v. Doe*, 361 F.3d at 95 (quoting *Snider v. Melindez*, 199 F.3d at 115).

The Second Circuit also stated that “[c]ontemporaneous classification of dismissals as strikes or non-strikes at a time when the ruling has no immediate consequences may also lead district courts to undertake such classifications carelessly, and with inadequate explanation of why a given dismissal falls into one category and not the other.” *Id.* (quoting *Snider v. Melindez*, 199 F.3d at 115, n. 4).

Here, Gill challenges four cases cited by the Defendants as “strikes.” Pl.’s Lt.-Resp. at p. 3. Addressing these cases specifically in light of Gill’s arguments and as noted above, we find that all four actions were dismissed on the merits and therefore, qualify as “strikes” against Gill for purposes of the “three strikes rule.”

Although the Southern District in deciding *Accettulli* and *Kross* did not expressly state that the cases were dismissed “with prejudice” in the orders of dismissal, the District Court dismissed Gill’s claims in both cases because they “lack[ed] an arguable basis either in law or fact.” *Gill v. Accettulli*, 92-CV-5039, Order of Dismissal, dated July 8, 1992, at p. 4 (S.D.N.Y.) (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. at 325); *Gill v. Anna M. Kross Center*, 92-CV-9326, Order of Dismissal, dated Dec. 28, 1992, at p. 2 (S.D.N.Y.) (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. at 325). Additionally, in *Kross*, the district court went on to “certify pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) that any appeal from this order would not be taken in good faith.” *Kross*, 92-CV-9326, at p. 2. Most importantly, Gill himself concedes that both the *Accettulli* and *Kross* cases “were dismissed due to they lacked an arguable basis in law or in fact.” Pl.’s Lt.-Resp. at p. 3. In light of these statements and Gill’s concession, the **dismissals** of the claims in these cases were clearly on the merits, even though the court did not specifically use the language “with or without prejudice.” Each of these cases would, therefore, qualify as “strikes” against the Plaintiff.

A review of the docket shows that both the *LeFevre* and *Padilla* cases were **dismissed** by the Northern District for failure to prosecute pursuant to Rule 11 of the Federal

Rules of Civil Procedure.<sup>FN7</sup> By his own admission, Gill concedes that these two cases were **dismissed** pursuant to FED.R.CIV.P. 11. Irrespective of specific language used in the District’s Decisions and Orders **dismissing** these actions, we find that a Rule 11 **dismissal** is a **dismissal** on the merits. Therefore, these two cases would also each qualify as “**strikes**” against the Plaintiff.

<sup>FN7</sup>. A history of failure to prosecute is akin to the **filing** of a frivolous claim.

From the discussion and analysis above, it is clear that these types of **dismissals** are precisely what Congress had in mind when it enacted the **PLRA**, hoping to discourage and limit the amount of *frivolous lawsuits* brought by prisoner litigants. Accordingly, the Court finds that Gill, while incarcerated or detained, had acquired at least three “**strikes**” at the time he **commenced** the present action.

#### D. Exception to the “Three Strikes Rule”

\*5 Notwithstanding prior **dismissals**, an inmate can overcome the “three **strikes** rule” and proceed with an action if the prisoner can show that he or she “is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). This imminent danger exception, however, applies only to impending harms that existed at the time the complaint is filed, and not to those harms which already occurred. *Malik v. McGinnis*, 293 F.3d 559, 563 (2d Cir.2002) (“[T]he language of § 1915(g) makes clear that the ‘imminent danger’ exception only applies to danger existing at the time the complaint is filed.”). Based upon a review of Gill’s Complaint, there is nothing to suggest that he was under imminent threat of serious physical injury at the time he filed his Complaint. While Gill raises this exception in his opposition to Defendants’ Motion, his claim that he “was encountering impending harms at the time [he] filed this [C]omplaint due to [the fact that] he was still incarcerated at Auburn C[orrectional] F[acility]” is clearly insufficient to overcome the “three strikes rule.” Pl.’s Lt.-Resp. at p. 2. Permitting a prisoner to defeat the “three strikes” bar by simply citing incarceration as the impending harm runs afoul of Congress’ intent in enacting § 1915 and would essentially render the PLRA meaningless.

#### E. Revoking Gill’s IFP Status

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Gill argues that the Defendants are estopped from moving to revoke his *in forma pauperis* status because they failed to move for revocation during earlier proceedings, specifically in their [Rule 12\(b\)\(6\)](#) Motion to Dismiss, filed on December 23, 2002, *see* Dkt. No. 6, in their Letters to the Court in support of their Motion to Dismiss, filed on April 24, 2003 and May 7, 2003, *see* Dkt. Nos. 14 & 15, during Plaintiff's oral deposition taken in May 2005, or in Defendants' Answer, filed on June 20, 2006.<sup>[FN8](#)</sup> Pl.'s Lt.-Resp. at p. 4.

[FN8](#). Gill also cites applications made by the Defendants to the Second Circuit during his Appeal of Judge Hood's Order and Judgment, *see* Dkt. Nos. 17-19, wherein he alleges Defendants failed to move for revocation of his IFP status, which was granted by the Circuit on August 1, 2003. Pl.'s Lt.-Resp. at pp. 4-5. IFP status granted by the Second Circuit is separate and distinct from IFP status granted by the Northern District. Defendants' objections to IFP status granted by the Second Circuit are not relevant to Defendants' application before this Court and would have no bearing on his IFP status in this District. Further, any objections put forth by the Defendants' in papers submitted to the Second Circuit cannot be accessed or considered by this Court.

Contrary to Gill's suggestion, dismissal is not precluded by the fact that a litigant has already been granted IFP status. "When a court becomes aware of three prior strikes only after granting IFP status, the court may appropriately revoke that status and bar the complaint under [§ 1915\(g\)](#)." *Polanco v. Burge*, 05-CV-651, Rep.-Rec. & Order, dated May 12, 2006, at p. 3 (N.D.N.Y.) (citing [McFadden v. Parpan](#), 16 F.Supp.2d 246, 247 (E.D.N.Y.1998)).

In light of the foregoing, it is recommended that the Order granting IFP status to Gill be **vacated** and that Gill's Complaint be dismissed unless Gill pays the filing fee of \$150.00 **within thirty days (30) days** of the entry of the final order by the District Court.

### III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated herein, it is hereby  
**RECOMMENDED**, that the Order granting Gill's IFP status (Dkt. No. 4) be VACATED; and it is further

**RECOMMENDED** that Defendants' Letter-Motion seeking dismissal of Gill's Complaint pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(g\)](#) (Dkt. No. 35) be **GRANTED** unless Gill pays the filing fee of \$150.00 **within thirty days (30) days** of the entry of the final order by the District Court; and it is further

\***6 ORDERED**, that the Clerk of the Court serve a copy of this Report-Recommendation and Order upon the parties to this action by regular mail.

Pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 636\(b\)\(1\)](#), the parties have ten (10) days within which to file written objections to the foregoing report. Such objections shall be filed with the Clerk of the Court. **FAILURE TO OBJECT TO THIS REPORT WITHIN TEN (10) DAYS WILL PRECLUDE APPELLATE REVIEW**. [Roldan v. Racette](#), 984 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir.1993) (citing [Small v. Sec'y of Health and Human Servs.](#), 892 F.2d 15 (2d Cir.1989)); *see also* [28 U.S.C. § 636\(b\)\(1\)](#); [FED.R.CIV.P. 72, 6\(a\) & 6\(e\)](#).

N.D.N.Y.,2006.

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(Cite as: 2005 WL 2173950 (S.D.N.Y.))

## H

Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.

United States District Court,

S.D. New York.

Johnathon JOHNSON, Plaintiff,

v.

M.A. BARNEY, Prison Guard, and Oracz, Sergeant, and Frank J. Tracy, Superintendent, and Sullivan, Captain, Several Unknown Defendants, Defendants.

No. 04 Civ. 10204(LBS).

Sept. 6, 2005.

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

SAND, J.

\*1 Plaintiff brought this *pro se* prisoner's civil rights action pursuant to [42 U.S.C. § 1983](#) alleging that his Eighth Amendment constitutional rights were violated. Defendants now move to dismiss the complaint on the ground that plaintiff is in violation of the Prisoner Litigation Reform Act's "three strikes" provision. See [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(g\)](#).

### I. Background

Plaintiff alleges that on October 21, 2003, while temporarily incarcerated at Downstate Correctional Facility ("Downstate"), he was physically assaulted by M.A. Barney, a corrections officer, and three other unidentified corrections officers, while Sergeant Oracz observed the incident. Plaintiff claims that former Superintendent of Downstate, Frank J. Tracy, refused his request to preserve the videotape footage of the incident and that Captain Sullivan fabricated the report of the investigation into the incident.

Plaintiff further claims that he was "provoke[d] and harassed by the same prison guards [involved in the original assault]" when he returned to Downstate in August 2004.

### II. Discussion

Defendants move to dismiss the complaint on the ground that plaintiff is in violation of the Prisoner Litigation Reform Act's "three strikes provision."

Under the PLRA, a prisoner cannot "bring a civil action ... or proceeding [*in forma pauperis*] if the prisoner, has on 3 or more occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action ... in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted." [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(g\)](#). There is an exception to the three strikes rule, however, where a prisoner is under "imminent danger of serious physical injury." *Id.* Plaintiff does not dispute that he has had more than three actions dismissed as frivolous. The sole question, therefore, is whether the imminent danger exception applies.

The Second Circuit has adopted the construction of this statutory provision that every circuit to consider the issue has reached: the imminent danger exception applies only if a prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury at the time his or her complaint is filed. [Malik v. McGinnis](#), 293 F.3d 559, 562-63 (2d Cir.2002); see also [Martin v. Shelton](#), 319 F.3d 1048, 1050 (8th Cir.2003) ("[T]he exception focuses on the risk that the conduct complained of threatens continuing or future injury, not on whether the inmate deserves a remedy for past misconduct."). Here, the allegations of danger concern the Downstate Correctional Facility, while plaintiff is generally incarcerated at the Southport Correctional Facility. The fact that plaintiff may pass through Downstate on infrequent occasions in the future means that any threat he faces is merely hypothetical, rather than imminent. Moreover, there is no reason to believe plaintiff would be in danger of serious physical injury on the occasions when he may return to Downstate, for he has alleged only a single incident of past physical assault. Were this enough to constitute an ongoing danger, the requirement that the danger alleged be contemporaneous with the complaint would become almost meaningless.

\*2 Plaintiff's general allegation of "harassment" at

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Downstate during a subsequent stay there is also insufficient to trigger the imminent danger exception. *See Abdul-Akbar v. McElvie*, 239 F.3d 307, 315 (3d Cir.2001) (“[G]eneralized allegations [of harassment] strike us as insufficient to connect the separate incidents ... into a pattern of threats of serious physical injury that are ongoing.”)

Finally, plaintiff attempts to salvage his claim by arguing that Captain Sullivan, who was involved in the incident at Downstate, is currently employed as a corrections officer at Southport, where defendant generally resides. However, the only allegation against Sullivan is that he fabricated a report and not that he in any way physically threatened plaintiff. Therefore, plaintiff's contention that Sullivan's presence at Southport places him in imminent danger is without merit.

### III. Conclusion

For the reasons set forth above, defendant's motion to dismiss the complaint is granted.

SO ORDERED.

S.D.N.Y.,2005.

Johnson v. Barney

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